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December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of November 27, in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle, and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Jennings Randolph, Chairman,
Committee on Environment and Public Works,
United States Senate.

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The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs on 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/GW

Douglas J. Rennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

November 27, 1978

4 ACTION is assigned to ARA

Mr. Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary of State
Congressional Liaison
Department of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Bennet:

This communication is relative to the recent deaths associated with the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana.

I have had numerous inquiries in regard to the cost to the American taxpayer for the return of the bodies. Is there any plan to recoup the expenses for the return and preparation of the bodies from the Peoples Temple Church or families? If so, please provide me with the procedure and the estimate of the amount that may be recouped.

With appreciation for your attention to this request, and with best wishes, I am

Truly,

Jennings Randolph

Jennings Randolph

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